THE "APOLOGISTS"

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ABSTRACT

To accuse someone of being an "apologist" is outside the scope of serious scholarship and falls in the domain of propaganda. It is caricature of a perfectly normal and healthy human activity, the synthesis of knowledge and readjustment to historical truth. Despite being an unrelenting critic of imperialism, Iqbal said in a speech in 1909 that by introducing democracy in Asia, the British Empire was fulfilling a purpose of Islam which the Muslims themselves had been ignoring for centuries. The phenomenon has also been reflected in Iqbal Studies through Asian writers looking at Iqbal from the point of view of contemporary Western trends. Among them we find two schools. The first, which is sympathetic to Iqbal, approaches his works in an effort to understand it through Western methods. The other school doesn't find such similarities between Iqbal and Western trends and ends up denouncing him for that reason. What is common between them is their absolute deference to some school of Western scholarship. Practically every single strand of This criticism of Iqbal could be traced back to some Western writers.

1

A somewhat disturbing feature of the latter day colonial writing is the diminishing of boundaries between hate speech and serious thinking. A classic example was *Modern Islam in India* by W.C. Smith, published in 1944. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Smith was only in his twenties when he wrote that book and he moved on soon after.

Therefore it is a bit strange to find a senior scholar like H.A.R. Gibb (1895-1971) depending on polemic sources and borrowing arguments from them. In the foreword to *Modern Trends in Islam,* a set of lectures first delivered in 1945 and published in 1947, Gibb said:

> Almost all the books written in English or French by Muslim writers…turn out to be apologetic works, composed with the object of defending Islam and demonstrating its conformity with what their writers believe to be present-day thought. The outstanding exception is the Indian scholar and poet, Sir Muhammad Iqbal…

To accuse someone of being an "apologist" is outside the scope of serious scholarship and falls in the domain of propaganda. It is nothing more than name calling, and like all name calling it makes caricature of a perfectly normal and healthy human activity. In this case what is being caricatured is the synthesis of knowledge and readjustment to historical truth.[1] Gibb deserves some credit for not applying the epithet to Iqbal, yet his readiness to call others by this name prevented him from seeing the obvious fact that anyone who accuses someone else of being an "apologist" may herself or himself be called the same on precisely the same grounds. Hence the only "apologists" in an academic discourse are those who call others by this name.

For instance, Gibb called modern Muslim writings "apologetic" because, according to him, they were aimed at defending Islam and showing its conformity with contemporary thought. Contempt for such writings may itself be called an "apologetic" approach rooted in the colonialist position which Gibb himself stated in these words:

> …I make bold to say that the metaphors in which Christian doctrine is traditionally enshrined satisfy me intellectually as expressing symbolically the highest range of spiritual truth which I can conceive,

> provided that they are interpreted not in terms of anthropomorphic dogma but as general concepts, related to our changing views of the nature of the universe.

From the "modern" Muslim perspective, this was complete "other-worldliness" that could not offer more than a sectional view of reality. More than seventy years ago, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan had defined the alternate in these words:

> Nature not only imprints upon our minds her truth, perfection, and the relation which her multifarious products bear to one another, but it also points out another principle, according to which we may direct our actions and thoughts; and as Nature is true and perfect, this principle must necessarily be true and perfect, and this true and perfect principle is what we call true religion…[2]

This aspiration for a holistic and comprehensive view of reality was shared by most "modern" Muslim writers, including many who opposed Sir Syed on other issues. In the writing of Gibb we do not find a good acquaintance with this perspective and regrettably he also lost the opportunity of making this acquaintance through Iqbal– mainly because he didn't know much of Iqbal beyond what could be gathered from Nicholson, Smith and an outdated edition of the *Reconstruction*. Further, he restricted himself to a scrutiny of Iqbal in the light of established knowledge.

This shortcoming deserves to be understood in its historical perspective. When George Sale translated the Quran into English in 1734 he hoped that a better understanding of Islam would enable the Christian missionaries to eradicate the "false" religion and achieve through reason what their predecessors had failed to do through swords during the Crusades. Just a little more than two hundred years after Sale, sharing the same conviction about the truth of his faith, Gibb must have observed that not only his co-religionists had failed to eliminate Islam but in turn the "modern" Muslim writers were now using reason for promoting the alternate worldview which, if accepted, could force the Christian world to revise its own position on common themes.

Hence, on subjects such as "knowledge and religious experience," Gibb appeared hesitant even to make an effort for understanding Iqbal's ingenious perspective. He arbitrarily rejected the thesis because some Dean Lowe had said, "Once the path of mystical interpretation is entered, anything can mean anything."[3] To say the least, Gibb was approaching Iqbal like a schoolmaster judging a student's essay by matching it against a textbook.

Some sort of agony is discernible in the lines immediately following this emotional dismissal– one can almost hear the voice of the dignified scholar cracking up like that of someone who has lost

an appeal in the high court. "Iqbal's protest, in fact, fails on precisely the same grounds as the apologetic of the earlier modernists," says Gibb, and then the pitch gets louder. "On the basic issue of intellectual integrity, he did nothing to correct and much to confirm the cardinal error of all modernist thought– that while you may make your own religion what you choose, when you are dealing with the historic religious community, choosing is the sign of immaturity and spiritual presumption."[4]

Gibb had every reason to lose control. Even as his book was getting printed in the press of Chicago University, the "modern" Muslim position was receiving a favorable verdict from history itself: the birth of Pakistan, a sovereign Muslim state established not through swords but through the effectiveness of the same "modern" Muslim discourse which Gibb was trying so hard to discard as "apologetic."

2

> It would be a singularly dull-witted observer of the international scene who would still fail to realize that this new country is destined to play a very leading part in the coming drama of world-history," A.J. Arberry wrote about Pakistan six years later in his preface to the translation of Iqbal's *Mysteries of Selflessness* (1953). "For my own part, as a Christian not interested to persuade any Muslim to share my ancestral faith, I believe that the present discord between Christianity and Islam, if it cannot be resolved, can at least be so sensibly modified as to be removed from the perilous arena of emotion to the more tranquil debate of reason.

As a Christian not interested to persuade any Muslim to share his ancestral faith, Arberry was not giving importance to the fact that "the present discord between Christianity and Islam" had started solely due to his ancestors' attempt to do the opposite of what he was now professing. Unfortunately his failings went further than that.

Sir Syed, Iqbal and other "modern" Muslim writers never tired of giving credit to Europe for what was good about it. Despite being an unrelenting critic of imperialism, Iqbal went as far as declaring in a speech in 1909 that by introducing democracy in Asia, the British Empire was fulfilling a purpose of Islam which the Muslims themselves had been ignoring for centuries.[5] Arberry called these writers "apologists" for aiming at this perfectly legitimate synthesis of knowledge but he himself lifted a leaf out of their book and presented it as his own. At the same time he painted the Muslim writers as opponents of the worldview which he had actually borrowed from them! This is where scholarship gives way to

something else for which we may have only one name, and that is not a very happy one.

The allegation of plagiarism should be used sparingly because ideas do travel from one group to another in order to ensure the evolution of human civilization. Arberry is one rare example where the allegation of plagiarism seems to be justified because while borrowing the key concepts from his opponents he also tried to show that his opponents had never held such views.

In the passage quoted above, Arberry was giving an impression as if "the present discord between Christianity and Islam" was due to the "modern" Muslim writers' preference for "the perilous arena of emotion" to which he so magnanimously offered "the more tranquil debate of reason." Historically, the case was exactly the opposite, as Arberry himself admitted in another part of the same text where he said, "Europe for centuries was unfair to Islam…"

The solution which he was now offering was something which had been repeated countless times by those same "modern" Muslim writers whom he, just like Gibb, denounced as "apologists" (and unlike Gibb, he wasn't willing to make an exception for Iqbal):

> In the debate it will become apparent that the area of agreement between the two faiths is very much larger than the area of disagreement, generating the reasonable hope that opposition may in time give way to cooperation…

We need only compare Arberry's lines with Iqbal's statement in the *Allahabad Address* in order to see the similarities. Iqbal had said:

> Indeed the first practical step that Islam took towards the realization of a final combination of humanity was to call upon peoples possessing practically the same ethical ideal to come forward and combine. The Quran declares, "O people of the Book! Come let us join together on the 'word' (Unity of God), that is common to us all." The wars of Islam and Christianity, and, later, European aggression in its various forms, could not allow the infinite meaning of this verse to work itself out in the world of Islam. Today it is being gradually being realized in the countries of Islam in the shape of what is called Muslim Nationalism…

Arberry's moral failing was to discredit the "modern" Muslim writers while borrowing from them without acknowledging the source. One wonders why he had to write lines such as the following– and how could *he* write them:

> When Iqbal wrote, "Believe me, Europe to-day is the greatest hindrance in the way of man's ethical advancement," he was not saying anything that he had not said before, and he was not seeking merely to provoke and shock; neither was he a solitary voice crying in the wilderness. The present threats to the peace and security of the world are certainly not few…

Ironically, the line which Arberry quoted from Iqbal is from the sixth lecture of the *Reconstruction* where it appears in a passage which may have been the original source from where Arberry stole the olive leaf he was offering as his own. In the words of Iqbal, the passage reads like this:

> Humanity needs three things today– a spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual, and basic principles of a universal import directing the evolution of human society on a spiritual basis. Modern Europe has, no doubt, built idealistic systems on these lines, but experience shows that truth revealed through pure reason is incapable of bringing that fire of living conviction which personal revelation alone can bring. This is the reason why pure thought has so little influenced men, while religion has always elevated individuals, and transformed whole societies. The idealism of Europe never became a living factor in her life, and the result is a perverted ego seeking itself through mutually intolerant democracies whose sole function is to exploit the poor in the interest of the rich. Believe me, Europe to-day is the greatest hindrance in the way of man's ethical advancement…[6]

The three things which, according to Iqbal, the world needed were presented by Arberry as his own and just how much was lost through poor rewording may be assessed by looking at the plagiarized version in his preface:

> …it is imperative that we should make a renewed and unremitting effort to understand each other's viewpoint, and to study what possibilities exist for, first, a diminishing of tension, next, a rational compromise, and, ultimately, an agreement to work together towards common ideals…

3

Two significant changes were noticeable in "the mind of Europe" in decades preceding Arberry. The first was that, possibly due to the diminishing control of the Church, it became possible for many Europeans to formally convert to other religions without losing their loyalty to the mind of Europe. Among the earliest examples was the French writer Rene Guenon who embraced Islam in 1911 but still was able to get married in a Catholic Church five years later while wearing a ring inscribed with the Sanskrit word *Om* right up to his death. The concept behind such conversions was best explained by Guenon's successor Frithjof Schuon who in 1932, just before his conversion to Islam at the age of twenty-five, wrote to a friend:

> Have I ever said that the path to God passes through Mecca? If there were any essential difference between a path that passes through Benares and one that passes through Mecca, how could you think that I would wish to come to God "through Mecca," and thereby betray

> Christ and the Vedanta? In what way does the highest spiritual path pass through Mecca or Benares or Lhasa or Jerusalem or Rome? Is the Nirvana of Mecca different from the Nirvana of Benares simply because it is called *fana* and not *nirvana?* Do I have to explain to you once again that either we are esoterics and metaphysicians who transcend forms– just as Christ walked over the waters– and who make no distinction between Allah and Brahma, or else are exoterics, "theologians"– or at best mystics– who consequently live in forms like fish in water, and who make a distinction between Mecca and Benares?[7]

It is not difficult to see that the distinction made by Schuon between esoterics and theologians was similar to the one between practitioners of religion and scholars of comparative history of religions, which was later implied in Dr. McDonough's position.

The second change which corresponded to this type of conversions was that after the collapse of European colonialism it became possible for a non-European to connect with the mind of Europe on the same conditions which Eliot had prescribed for a European: "continual surrender of himself" to the mind of Europe (but *not* to the mind of his own country in this case).

Students, scholars and writers in Asia used to surrender themselves to the mind of Europe even in the days of colonialism but they evoked suspicion among their country folk and contempt among the foreign masters. The basis for suspicion or contempt vanished when East and West became equals at the end of colonialism. The number of Asians surrendering to "the mind of Europe" increased dramatically and was duly precipitated by the mushrooming of area study centers, Islamic Studies centers and centers for the study of comparative history of religions in the West around the same time.

The phenomenon has been reflected in Iqbal Studies through Asian writers looking at Iqbal from the point of view of contemporary Western trends. Among them we find two schools. The first, which is sympathetic to Iqbal, approaches his works in an effort to understand it through Western methods. Typically, a writer of this school ends up with showing similarities between Iqbal's thought and those Western trends which the writer upholds, whether it is Western philosophy, comparative history of religions or transcendent unity of religion. The other school doesn't find such similarities between Iqbal and Western trends and ends up denouncing him for that reason. What is common between them is their absolute deference to some school of Western scholarship.

Among the most notable early examples of the first school we find the well-known Iqbal scholar Khalifa Abdul Hakeem (1893-1959) and the very talented literary critic Aziz Ahmad (1913-78).

Hakeem was a frequent visitor of Iqbal and his efforts for promoting liberal Islamic values in the early days of Pakistan may never be forgotten. Therefore one is surprised by the great extent to which he followed the opinions of Nicholson and Forster about "the influence of Nietzsche on Iqbal" in his own writings including a famous volume in Urdu, *Fikr-i-Iqbal (The Thought of Iqbal).*

Aziz Ahmed also penned a very influential book in Urdu, *Iqbal: Nai Tashkeel* (*Iqbal: the Reconstruction),* which was published in 1947, just before the birth of Pakistan. It sought to offer a creative and original exposition of Iqbal's thought but it rested on the premise that Iqbal's thought was in remarkable conformity with Karl Marx and that his grasp of socialism was not as bad as others were giving it out to be.

It is ironical, since these native stalwarts had a better familiarity with primary sources than those foreign celebrities to whom they were deferring. Yet a curious truth about Iqbal Studies is that external sources have often become handicap for writers who may have done better on their own.

Those "socialist friends" who had told the young W.C. Smith in the 1940s that Iqbal did not have a deep understanding of socialism may be counted among the early manifestations of the other school of pro-West Asian writers, which denounces Iqbal for his differences with some Western thinker– in this instance, Karl Marx.

Writers of this school usually follow Gibb and Arberry in making a virtue out of calling the earlier Muslim writers "apologists" and often display exceptional hostility towards Iqbal. A notable example has been Seyyed Hossein Nasr, whose *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (1988) was a diligent effort to revisit the contemporary Muslim world in the light of interpretations offered mainly by modern French writers such as Rene Guenon and Frithjof Schuon, and Englishmen such as Martin Lings (all of whom converted to Islam in the latter period of European colonialism). In the last chapter, Nasr denounced Iqbal:

> who was influenced both by the Victorian concept of evolution and Nietzsche's idea of the superman. Iqbal is an influential contemporary figure of Islam but, with all due respect to him as a poet, his ideas should be studied in the light of the *ijtihad* which he himself preached so often. He should certainly not be put on a pedestal. If we analyze his thought carefully we see that he had an ambivalent attitude towards many things, including a love-hate relationship with Sufism. He admired Rumi yet expressed dislike for a figure like Hafiz. This is due to the fact that he was drawn, on the one hand, by the Sufi, and more generally speaking Islamic, idea of the Perfect Man (*al-insan al-kamil*) and on the other by the Nietzschean idea of the superman, two

> concepts which are, in fact, the very antipode of each other. Iqbal made the great mistake of seeking to identify the two. He made this fatal error because, despite his deep understanding of certain aspects of Islam, he had come to take the prevalent idea of evolution too seriously. He demonstrates on a more literate and explicit level a tendency to be found among the many modern Muslim writers who, instead of answering the fallacies of the theory of evolution, have tried to bend over backwards in an apologetic manner to accept it and even to interpret Islamic teachings according to it.[8]

Nasr did not quote any reference for what he was attributing to Iqbal. At the end of the passage a number appeared in superscript but the corresponding endnote turned out to be, not a reference, but only more unsubstantiated delineation of similar nature. Neither did the name of Iqbal occur in the "Select Bibliography" at the end of the book.

"If we analyze his thought carefully…" Nasr had said, but the phrase seemed to be rhetorical, for the text did not provide any evidence of careful analysis on part of Nasr: practically every single strand of his criticism of Iqbal could be traced back to some Western writer (from among those whom we have discussed). Also, it was amazing how similar his tone was to the hate speech of Gibb and Arberry.

Postscript:
In His Own Words

My Dear Dr. Nicholson,[9]

I was very glad to learn from your letter to Shafi[10] that your translation of the *Asrar-i-Khudi* has been favourably received and excited much attention in England. Some of the English reviewers, however, have been misled by the superficial resemblance of some of my ideas to those of Nietzsche.[11] The view of the writer in *The Athenaeum*[12] is largely affected by some mistakes of fact, for which, however, the writer does not seem to be responsible. But I am sure if he had known some of the dates of the publication of my Urdu poems referred to in his review, he would have certainly taken a totally different view of the growth of my literary activity. Nor does he rightly understand my idea of the Perfect Man, which he confounds with the German thinker's Superman. I wrote on the Sufi doctrine of the Perfect Man more than twenty years ago– long before I had read or heard anything of Nietzsche. This was then published in *The Indian Antiquary*[13] and later, in 1908, formed part of my book on Persian Metaphysics.[14] The English reader ought to approach this idea not through the German thinker, but through an English thinker of great merit– I mean Alexander,[15] whose Gifford Lectures delivered in Glasgow were published last year. His chapter on Deity and God (ii.341) is worth reading. On page 347 he says: "Deity is thus the next higher empirical quality to mind, which the universe is engaged in bringing to birth. That the universe is pregnant with such a quality we are speculatively assured. What that quality is we cannot know; for we can neither enjoy nor still less contemplate it. Our human altars still are raised to the unknown God. If we could know what Deity is, how it feels to be Divine, we should first have to become as God." Alexander's thought is much bolder than mine. I believe there is a Divine tendency in the universe, but this tendency will eventually find its complete expression in a higher man, not in a God subject to Time, as Alexander implies in his discussion of the subject. I do not agree with Alexander's view of God; but it is clear that my idea of the Perfect Man will lose much of its outlandishness in the eye of the English reader if he approaches it through the ideas of a thinker of his own country.

But it was Mr. Lowes Dickinson's review[16] which interested me most, and I want to make a few remarks on it.

1. Mr. Dickinson thinks, as I understand from his private letter to me,[17] that I have deified physical force in the poem. He is, however, mistaken in his view. I believe in the power of the spirit, not brute force. When a people is called to a righteous war, it is, according to my belief, their duty to obey the call; but I condemn all war of conquest (cf. the story of Miyan Mir and the Emperor of India).[18] But Mr. Dickinson is quite right when he says that war is destructive, whether it is waged in the interest of truth and justice or in the interests of conquest and exploitation. It must be put an end to in any case. We have seen, however, that treaties, leagues, arbitrations and conferences cannot put an end to it. Even if we secure these in a more effective manner than before, ambitious nations will substitute more peaceful forms of the exploitation of races supposed to be less favoured or less civilized. The truth is that we stand in need of a living personality to solve our social problems, to settle our disputes and to place international morality on a surer basis. How very true are the last two paragraphs of Prof. Mackenzie's *Introduction to Social Philosophy* (pp.367ff).[19] I take the liberty to transcribe them here:

> There can be no ideal society without ideal men: and for the production of these we require not only insight but a motive power; fire as well as light. Perhaps a philosophical understanding of our social problems is not even the chief want of our time. We need prophets as well as teachers, men like Carlyle or Ruskin or Tolstoy, who are able to add for us a new severity to conscience or a new breadth to duty. Perhaps we want a new Christ… It has been well said that the wilderness of the present is in the incessant war by which we are trying to make our way upwards. It is there that the prophet must be.
>
> Or perhaps our chief want is rather for the poet of the new age than for its prophet– or for one who should be poet and prophet in one. Our poets of recent generations have taught us the love of nature, and enabled us to see in it the revelation of the divine. We still look for one who shall show us with the same clearness the presence of the divine in the human… We shall need one who shall be fully and in all seriousness what Heine playfully called himself, a 'Ritter von dem Heiligen Geist,' one who shall teach us to see the working out of our highest ideals in everyday life of the world, and to find in devotion to the advancement of that life, not merely a sphere for an ascetic self-sacrifice, but a supreme object in the pursuit of which 'all thoughts, all passions, all delights' may receive their highest development and satisfaction.

It is in the light of such thoughts that I want the British public to read my description of the ideal man. It is not our treaties and arbitrations which will put an end to the internecine wars of the

human family. A living personality alone will effectively do such a thing, and it is to him that I say:

Bring once more days of peace to the world,
Give a message of peace to them that seek battle.[20]

2. Mr. Dickinson further refers to my "Be hard." This is based on the view of reality that I have taken in the poem. According to my belief reality is a collection of individualities tending to become a harmonious whole through conflict which must inevitably lead to mutual adjustment. This conflict is a necessity in the interests of the evolution of higher forms of life and of personal immortality. Nietzsche did not believe in personal immortality. To those desiring it he ruthlessly says: "Do you wish to be a perpetual burden on the shoulders of time?"[21] He was led to say this because he had a wrong notion of time, and never tried to grapple with the ethical issue involved in the question of time. On the other hand I look upon immortality as the highest aspiration of man, on which he should focus all his energies, and consequently I recognize the need of all forms of activity, including conflict, which tend to make the human person more and more stable.[22] And for the same consideration I condemn speculative mysticism and inactive quietism. My interest in conflict is mainly ethical and not political, whereas Nietzsche's was probably only political. Modern physical science has taught us that the atom of material energy has achieved its present form through many thousands of years of evolution. Yet it is unstable and can be made to disappear. The same is the case with the atom of mind-energy, i.e. the human person. It has achieved its present form through aeons of incessant effort and conflict; yet, in spite of all this, its instability is clear from the various phenomena of mental pathology. If it is to continue intact it cannot ignore the lessons learnt from its past career, and will require the same (or similar) forces to maintain its stability which it has availed itself or before. It is possible that in its onward march nature may modify or eliminate altogether some of the forces (e.g. conflict in the way of mutual wars) that have so far determined and helped its evolution, and introduce new forces hitherto unknown to mankind, to secure its stability. But I confess I am not an idealist in this matter, and believe this time to be very distant. I am afraid mankind will not, for a very long time to come, learn the lesson that the Great European War[23] has offered them. Thus it is clear that my purpose in recognizing the need of conflict is merely ethical. Mr. Dickinson has unfortunately altogether ignored this aspect of the "Be hard."

3. Mr. Dickinson further remarks that while my philosophy is universal, my application of it is particular and exclusive. This is in a

sense true. The humanitarian ideal is always universal in poetry and philosophy; but if you make it an effective ideal and work it out in actual life, you must start, not with poets and philosophers, but with a society exclusive, in the sense of having a creed and a well-defined outline, but ever enlarging its limits by example and persuasion.[24] Such a society, according to my belief, is Islam. This society has so far proved itself a most successful opponent of the race-idea, which is probably the hardest barrier in the way of the humanitarian ideal. Renan[25] was wrong when he said that science is the greatest enemy of Islam. No, it is the race-idea which is the greatest enemy of Islam– in fact of all humanity; and it is the duty of all lovers of mankind to stand in revolt against this dreadful invention of the Devil. Since I find that the idea of nationality– based on race or territory– is making headway in the world of Islam, and since I fear that the Muslims, losing sight of their own ideal of a universal humanity, are being lured by the idea of a territorial nationality, I feel it is my duty, as a Muslim and as a lover of all men, to remind them of their true function in the evolution of mankind. Tribal and national organization on the lines of race or territory are only a temporary phase in the unfolding and upbringing of collective life, and as such I have no quarrel with them; but I condemn them in the strongest possible terms when they are regarded as the ultimate expression of the life of mankind. While I have the greatest love for Islam, it is in view of practical and not patriotic considerations, as Mr. Dickinson thinks, that I am compelled to start with a specific society (e.g. Islam) which, among the societies of the world, happens to be the only one suitable to my purpose. Nor is the spirit of Islam so exclusive as Mr. Dickinson thinks. In the interests of a universal unification of mankind the Quran ignores their minor differences and says: "Come let us unite on what is common to us all."[26]

I am afraid the old European idea of a blood-thirsty Islam is still lingering in the mind of Dr. Dickinson. All men and not Muslims alone are meant for the kingdom of God on earth, provided they say good-bye to their idols of race and nationality, and treat one another as personalities. Leagues, mandates, treaties, like the one described by Mr. Keynes,[27] and imperialisms, however draped in democracy, can never bring salvation to mankind. The salvation of man lies in absolute equality and freedom of all. We stand in need of a thorough overhauling of the uses of science which have brought so much misery to mankind, and of a total abandonment of what may be called esoteric politics, which is ever planning the ruin of less clever or weaker races.

That Muslim peoples have fought and conquered like other peoples, and that some of their leaders have screened their personal ambition behind the veil of religion, I do not deny; but I am absolutely sure that territorial conquest was no part of the original programme of Islam. As a matter of fact I consider it a great loss that the progress of Islam as a conquering faith stultified the growth of those germs of an economic and democratic organization of society, which I find scattered up and down the pages of the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet. No doubt the Muslims succeeded in building a great empire, but thereby they largely repaganized their political ideals and lost sight of some of the most important potentialities of their faith.[28] Islam certainly aims at absorption. This absorption, however, is to be achieved, not by territorial conquest, but by the simplicity of its teaching, its appeal to the common sense of mankind, and its aversion from abstruse metaphysical dogma.[29] That Islam can succeed by its inherent force is sufficiently clear from the Muslim missionary work in China, where it has won millions of adherents without the help of any political power. I hope that more than twenty years' study of the world's thought has given me sufficient training to judge things impartially.

The object of my Persian poems is not to make out a case for Islam; my aim is simply to discover a universal social reconstruction, and in this endeavour I find it philosophically impossible to ignore a social system which exists with the express object of doing away with all the distinctions of caste, rank and race, and which, while keeping a watchful eye on the affairs of this world, fosters a spirit of the unworldliness so absolutely essential to man in his relations with his neighbours. This is what Europe lacks, and this is what she can still learn from us.

One word more, in my notes which now form part of your introduction to *Asrar-i-Khudi* I deliberately explained my position in reference to Western thinkers, as I thought this would facilitate the understanding of my views in England. I could have easily explained myself in the light of the Quran and Muslim Sufis and thinkers, e.g. Ibn Arabi and Iraqi (Pantheism), Wahid Mahmud (Reality as a Plurality), Al-Jili (the idea of the Perfect Man) and Mujaddid Sarhindi (the human person in relation to the Divine Person).[30] As a matter of fact I did so explain myself in my Hindustani[31] introduction to the 1st edition of the *Asrar*.

I claim that the philosophy of the *Asrar* is a direct development out of the experience and speculation of old Muslim Sufis and thinkers. Even Bergson's[32] idea of time is not quite foreign to our Sufis. The Quran is certainly not a book of metaphysics, but it takes

a definite view of life and destiny of man, which must eventually rest on propositions of a metaphysical import. A statement by a modern Muslim student of philosophy of such a proposition, especially invoked by that great book, is not putting new wine in old bottles.[1] It is only a restatement of the old in the light of the new. It is unfortunate that the history of Muslim thought is so little known in the West. I wish I had time to write an extensive book on the subject to show the Western student of philosophy how philosophic thinking makes the whole world kin.

Yours very sincerely,
Muhammad Iqbal
Lahore, 26th January, 1921

NOTES AND REFERENCE

[1] Iqbal treated this phenomenon very differently, for instance when he wrote in his private notebook *Stray Reflections* in 1910: "Our Soul discovers itself when we come into contact with a great mind. It is not until I had realised the Infinitude of Goethe's imagination that I discovered the narrow breadth of my own."

[2] Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1870), *Essays on the Life of Muhammad,* "Preface and Introduction", p.*v-vi.*

[3] "We must surely give Iqbal credit for courage and sincerity. But courage and sincerity are not enough. Nor can we even accept the plea that in his new theology he at least laid a foundation on which others might build after him, clarifying his vision and supplying an appropriate ethical content. As Dean Lowe has said: 'However attractive it may be to find deeper, inner meanings in a limited number of passages…the risk of arbitrariness and subjectivity offsets any possible gain. Once the path of mystical interpretation is entered, anything can mean anything.'" (Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam,* pp.83-4; ellipses are his)

[4] Gibb (1947), *Modern Trends in Islam,* p.84

[5] This was "Islam as a Moral and Political Ideal", a lecture delivered in 1909 and not included in the "canon" of his writings. In his private notebook a year later he tried to resolve this paradox: "A disinterested foreign rule is an impossibility. Yet the tutelage of nations is a necessity. The fee paid for this tuition is sometimes a nation's daily bread…"

[6] Iqbal went on to say that the Muslims were in possession of "these ultimate ideas" on the basis of a revelation and therefore they ought to evolve, "out of the hitherto partially revealed purpose of Islam, that spiritual democracy which is the

[1] In his review, Dickinson had written of Iqbal: "Muhammad is his Prophet and the Qur'an his Bible. He thinks, or he chooses to affirm, that his gospel is also the gospel of that ancient book, so inveterate is the determination of men to put new wine into old bottles."

ultimate aim of Islam."

[7] Letter to a friend, Albert Oesch, dated May 15, 1932, quoted in Aymard & Laude (2004, 2005), *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings,* p.16

[8] Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1988), *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man,* published by Suhail Academy, Lahore, p.139

[9] Iqbal wrote this letter to R.A. Nicholson regarding the 'Introduction' and some of the reviews on the *Secrets of the Self*. It was published in *The Quest,* London, October 1920-July 1921, Volume XII, pp. 484-492. Source: Riffat Hassan, ed (1977), *The Sword and the Scepter*

[10] This must be Prof. Muhammad Shafi whom Nicholson had also mentioned in his 'Introduction' as "my friend Muhammad Shafi, now Professor of Arabic at Lahore, with whom I read the poem and discussed many points of difficulty."

[11] Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), German philosopher and the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1885).

[12] This is a reference to E.M. Forster's review, which has been discussed in the previous chapters.

[13] In September 1900.

[14] *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia,* first published by Luzac, London in 1908.

[15] Samuel Alexander (1859-1938), Australian-born Jewish British philosopher. His Gifford lectures were delivered in the winters of 1917 and 1918 and published in 1920 as *Space, Time and Deity* (reprinted with a new preface in 1927). It consisted of four books divided into two volumes. 'Deity and God', from which Iqbal quotes in the next lines, is Chapter 1 of Book IV (second volume) and the quoted passage occurs under the subheading, 'Deity the next higher empirical quality than mind.'

[16] Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (1862-1932); the reference is to his review. Later his biography of Iqbal's teacher James McTaggart, published in 1931, was reviewed by Iqbal in a literary journal of London. His own biography was written by E.M. Forster and published as *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson* in 1934. For other details, see previous chapters.

[17] The letter is not extant. Iqbal used to destroy private correspondence out of courtesy for the correspondents.

[18] The chapter on war in 'The Secrets of the Self' includes a story about the emperor of India (apparently Shahjehan) visiting a saint of Lahore to seek blessing for a war of conquest. In the meanwhile, a poor disciple comes offers a coin to the saint. The saint says, "This money ought to be given to our Sultan, who is a beggar wearing the raiment of a king. Though he holds sway over sun, moon and stars, our Emperor is the most penniless of mankind. His eye is fixed on the table of strangers; the fire of his hunger hath consumed a whole world…"

[19] John Stuart Mackenzie, British philosopher (and from 1890-1896, fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, where Iqbal studied from 1905-1907); *An Introduction to Social Philosophy: The Shaw Fellowship Lectures at Glasgow* was published in 1890, and a second edition came out in 1895.

[20] The lines are from the section on "divine vicegerency" in 'The Secrets of the Self'.

[21] Perhaps in defiance to Nietzsche, Iqbal addresses the world of nature in the sixth book of his poetry, *Baal-i-Gabriel (Gabriel's Wing):* "For whose manifestation are the day and the night in perpetual race? Am I a heavy burden on the shoulders of time, or are you?" (Poem 4, Section 2).

[22] While discussing immortality in the fourth lecture in the *Reconstruction* (1930/34), Iqbal says: "Life is one and continuous. Man marches always onward to receive

ever fresh illuminations from an Infinite Reality which 'every moment appears in a new glory'. And the recipient of Divine illumination is not merely a passive recipient. Every act of a free ego creates a new situation, and thus offers further opportunities of creative unfolding."

[23] This was Iqbal's way of referring to the First World War, or World War I (1914-1918). Before the Second World War, or World War II (1939-1945), it used to be known by various names including the Great War, the World War, the War to End All Wars and the War in Europe.

[24] In the *Allahabad Address,* while laying out the concept of a Muslim state (later named Pakistan), Iqbal stated: "One of the profoundest verses in the Holy Quran teaches us that the birth and rebirth of the whole of humanity is like the birth and rebirth of a single individual. Why cannot you who, as a people, can well claim to be the first practical exponent of this superb conception of humanity, live and move and have your being as a single individual?"

[25] Ernest Renan (1823-1892), French philosopher and writer best known for his writings on early Christianity and his political theories. Iqbal also mentioned him in the *Allahabad Address* (1930).

[26] The Quran, Chapter 3: "The House of Imran" Verse 64. Iqbal also quoted this verse in the *Allahabad Address* (see quotation in the previous chapter).

[27] John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) was British economist and a member of the Bloomsbury Group. His polemic *The Economic Consequence of Peace* (published in December 1919) influenced the American and British decisions at Versailles. In addition to statistics (many of which were wrong about the future) he owed his success to sarcastic jibes at President Wilson, Prime Minister George Lloyd and the French statesman Clemenceau. Apparently, he imitated his friend and lover Strachey, who also advised on the draft.

[28] In the sixth lecture of the *Reconstruction* (1930/34), 'The Principle of Movement in Islam', Iqbal stated: "…in view of the basic idea of Islam that there can be no further revelation binding on man, we ought to be spiritually one of the most emancipated peoples on earth. Early Muslims emerging out of the spiritual slavery of pre-Islamic Asia were not in a position to realize the true significance of this basic idea. Let the Muslim of to-day appreciate his position, reconstruct his social life in the light of ultimate principles, and evolve, out of the hitherto partially revealed purpose of Islam, that spiritual democracy which is the ultimate aim of Islam."

[29] In Iqbal's last "grand" poem, 'The Devil's Parliament', the Satan commands his counselors to indulge the Muslims in abstruse metaphysical dogma in order to keep them away from the real world.

[30] "e.g. Ibn Arabi and Iraqi… in relation to the Divine Person)": these phrases are not found in Riffat Hassan, ed. (1977) and is only found in B.A. Dar, ed. (1977), *The Letters of Iqbal,* published by Iqbal Academy Pakistan, pp.146-147.

[31] Apparently, "Hindustani" here means Urdu. Introduction to the first edition of *Asrar-i-Khudi* (1915) appeared in Urdu although the poem was in Persian. This introduction, along with controversial verses against Hafiz of Shiraz, was eliminated from the second edition, which is supposed to have appeared around 1917. *Payam-i-Mashriq* (1923) is now the only Persian book in the "canon" to have an introduction, and that is also in Urdu.

[32] Henri-Louis Bergson (1859-1941), French philosopher and the author of *Creative Evolution* (1910; translated into English in 1911); Iqbal met him in Paris in 1933.